

2005 Legislative Report

22nd Legislative District



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Dear Neighbors,

We are proud to be your state representatives for the 22nd Legislative District, which extends from Tumwater in the South to Johnson Point in the North and includes Tumwater, Olympia, and Lacey.

We believe the people of Washington deserve the Legislature's best effort to represent their hopes and aspirations for a better future. Citizens should demand leadership, and not settle for political excuses and inaction.

We are committed to a strong Washington that invests in education, protects our environment, and ensures greater access to high-quality, affordable health care—including long-term care. A strong Washington also depends on retaining top-quality teachers and state employees and we are committed to fairly compensating public employees for their hard work.

With your help, we can accomplish these goals, but it is important that we keep in touch. This newsletter highlights several key 2005 priorities. Please take a look inside, and let us know what *you* think. Help us make Washington and the South Sound even better places to live.

Sincerely,


Rep. Sam Hunt


Rep. Brendan Williams

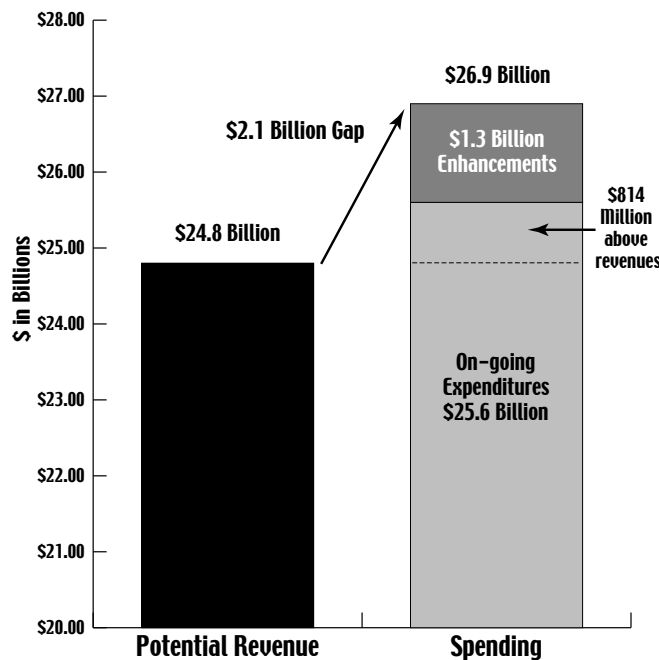
Rep. Sam Hunt • Rep. Brendan Williams

The State's Budget

We cannot have effective government without good government budgets. Despite slashing more than \$3 billion from the state budget in recent years, the Legislature is yet again facing a huge state revenue shortfall, estimated at \$2.1 billion. We can no longer afford the delusion that slashing public services and ignoring public employees will solve our chronic revenue problems.

Where has the “just cut government” approach to our problems taken us? Consider just a few facts:

\$2.1 Billion General Fund–State Shortfall



- State employees have gone four years, and teachers three years, without cost-of-living pay increases—while being burdened with far higher health care costs. We support ratification of the state employee collective bargaining agreement.
- Washington has fallen to 42nd nationally in K-12 education funding. Voter-passed education initiatives (I-728 & I-732) have been suspended for lack of funds. Further, thousands of *qualified* students are being locked out or priced out of college opportunities. For the first time in state history, community college graduates have been turned away from our four-year universities, due to lack of room.
- An estimated 62,000 children in Washington have lost publicly-funded health coverage in less than two years.
- Medicaid care for over 12,000 of our most vulnerable adults in nursing homes is still funded on a 1999 cost basis, while vital state-paid home care workers are getting just \$8.93 an hour.
- Washington ranks 50th nationally in state funding of courts.

Despite the billions of dollars in budget and tax cuts that created these realities, we are again in a financial hole. While some further budget reductions will be necessary; cuts alone are obviously not the answer. We will fight for a 2005-06 state budget that keeps faith with the responsibilities of government to citizens – even if it means voting for additional revenues.

How do we pay for quality?

Part of our state budget crisis is due to a tax code that is riddled with special-interest loopholes and that relies excessively on disproportionate property sales and business taxes. As the Washington State Tax Structure Study headed by Bill Gates, Sr., concluded, our current tax system “*is fundamentally inequitable to low- and middle-income people, unfair to many businesses, and subject to sharp fluctuations in revenue.*”



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Sam Hunt was elected Majority Floor Leader for the House of Representatives (one of the top leadership positions).

The time for real leadership on tax reform is at hand. Unjustified tax exemptions for some mean higher tax bills for everyone else. That's why we both joined in sponsoring legislation that aims to apply the same zeal to auditing the public benefit of tax loopholes as we apply to auditing government efficiency.

In the long-term, we need an honest conversation about other tax reform options, including options (there are several) for constitutionally-limited income taxes that would be tied to lower property and sales taxes. The current B&O tax on gross business profits is a job-killer that should also be replaced with a more progressive approach. The public — at a general election — must retain the right to reject any proposed reforms. But leadership means giving people better choices, and for decades the public has been given only the choice of more or less of the same.

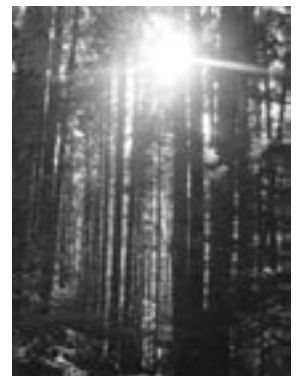
We encourage you to share your thoughts with us on tax reform. Everyone has a stake in state budgets and taxes, and everyone's view matters to us.



**Saving
Washington's
Ancestral trees
(HB 1360)**

The old-growth trees that made Washington the Evergreen State will not survive if we fail to see the forests through the logs. These are the ancestral trees that Lewis and Clark and the generation following them saw, and that still provide beauty, homes to wildlife, and protection for watersheds. The last remaining ancestral trees on our *public* lands belong to all of us, and we must protect them for future generations.

We've proposed to ban the sale or logging of ancestral trees that are at least 160 years old in western Washington. Our legislation applies only to evergreen trees on state-owned lands, and allows exceptions only for public safety and critical forest health needs. As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, let's make sure the majestic trees that defined Washington do not disappear forever.



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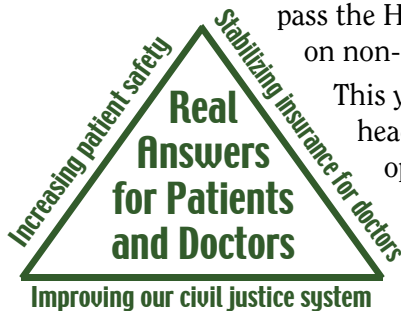
Supporting schools and teachers

Washington needs to support education, our paramount constitutional duty. We strongly believe the Legislature should honor Initiative 732 and give teachers a raise this year. We continue to ask teachers to do more to help students reach higher standards. If we want to have the best possible teachers, we need to recognize their achievements with better salaries. But the Legislature's commitment to schools cannot end there.

We are also co-sponsoring a constitutional amendment (HJR 4205) that would allow Washington voters to decide if school levies should pass with a simple majority vote. It is not right that we require 60% of voters to approve school levies but only 50% + 1 to approve other measures. If the principle of "majority rules" is good enough to pass a ballot initiative or elect a president, it's good enough to pass a school levy.

The House voted 73-25 to put simple majority on the November ballot. We hope the Senate will join us in supporting this important measure. The children of this state deserve the best education we can provide; enacting simple majority will enable school districts to save money spent on special elections and put it to work in classrooms. Children will be the winners!

Medical Malpractice: Putting patients first; protecting health care and legal rights of victims



House Democrats introduced a package of legislation that facilitates patient safety, makes much-needed insurance reforms and changes the litigation system so that the process is fairer. The public has heard a lot of noise from both sides of this issue, but this debate shouldn't be about protecting doctors or lawyers, or consumers versus insurance companies. The debate needs to focus on protecting people, and that's what we are going to do.

The legislation includes tough penalties for attorneys who abuse the legal system and stricter accountability for negligent physicians who commit repeated acts of malpractice.

Last session, House Democrats passed a total of 18 bills to address the problem of skyrocketing premiums for doctors in Washington. The Senate, however, refused to pass the House package without a limit on what injured patients can receive a cap on non-economic damages. Absolutism stood in the way of real progress.

This year the stakes have risen once again, with two competing initiatives headed to the ballot. The package of bills proposed by House Democrats opts for a "third way," however – one which seeks compromise and addresses all the concerns in the most comprehensive way possible.

The package is divided into three categories: bills that deal with civil liability reform, heard in the House Judiciary Committee; bills that address increased patient safety, heard in the House Health

Care Committee; and insurance reform proposals, heard in the House Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee.

For more information about the House Democrats' Medical Malpractice Reform package, as well as a list of all bills, please visit: http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/issues/health/2005_medmal.asp#



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Honoring Public Service

One of our first actions this session was co-sponsoring a resolution to honor those who serve in Washington's National Guard. It is important they be recognized for the daily sacrifices they make to protect Washington – from their disaster-relief efforts at home, to their duty overseas.

Honoring their service to our state and country is the right thing to do, but it is only a small token of our appreciation for their commitment to the safety and security of Washington's citizens.



Building on the leave-sharing law sponsored by Rep. Hunt in 2004 – allowing state employees to share leave with state employees called to active duty – we will be working to further strengthen the safety net for our veterans from all branches of the military.

Some of the legislation proposed would:

- ✓ Expand tuition waivers that schools can offer for families of veterans killed or totally disabled in action. The families of veterans who are listed as missing in action or who are prisoners of war are also eligible. (HB 1174)
- ✓ Make sure that services are provided for low-income or disadvantaged veterans and their families. The bill would also see to it that help is provided to the families of those veterans who have passed away. (HB 1189)
- ✓ Provide a life insurance policy for National Guard members called to active duty with a benefit of \$250,000. (HB 1343)
- ✓ Create the office of National Guard Ombudsman in the Office of the Governor for the purpose of helping National Guard members and their dependents obtain needed services including counseling services, marriage support, help with health care issues, pension and salary issues, and job issues. (HB 1517)
- ✓ Make the Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs Permanent. The JCVMA is a valuable and important committee. It deals with serious issues that affect our state such as base closures, veterans, and what happens to families when members of Washington's armed forces leave for, and return from, conflict. (HB 1261)

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Serving his first term, Williams is vice chair of the House Judiciary Committee, and also serves on the Financial Institutions & Insurance Committee as well as the Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks Committee. "I am truly honored to be given this opportunity to help people," says Williams.

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**Honoring
Public Service
*continued***

Washington does a good job of honoring military service for members of Plan 1 retirement systems (PERS, TERS & SERS). We believe Plan 2 members deserve no less, and have sponsored legislation to recognize their service and bring greater equity to the system.

Under our proposal (HB 1522), members of Plan 2 who performed military service prior to their work as state employees or teachers would be granted up to five additional years of service credit toward retirement. Further, they would not have to pay the employee's share of the plan contributions for this credit. Since these benefits are already enjoyed by Plan 1 members, it is only fair that members of Plan 2 and Plan 3 are treated with the same respect.

Military families have long been an important and welcome addition to our community. They have provided so much to our lives. That's why we will always be advocates on their behalf.

◆ **Save the Date!** ◆

**22nd District Town
Hall Meeting**

**Saturday, March 19th
2:00 pm**

• **Panorama City**

2315 Marina Ln SE

Lacey, WA 98503

In the basement of the Chalet

Please join us at our Town Hall Meeting, where we will discuss issues like:

- Managing the state budget challenge
- Improving access to affordable, quality health care
- Investing in our schools and public education
- Creating and protecting jobs

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